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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [IZ](#)  
SUBJECT: IECI HEAD: NAJAF READY FOR 2007 PROVINCIAL  
ELECTIONS

REF: HILLAH 36

Classified By: PRT Najaf Team Leader Mark G. Davison for reasons 1.4 (b)  
) and (d).

[1](#)1. (U) This is a PRT Najaf cable.

[1](#)2. (C) SUMMARY: The head of the Independent Electoral Commission for Iraq (IECI) in Najaf told PRT IPAOs that the province is ready to hold free and fair provincial elections when called for under controlling legislation. He dismissed fears of logistical complications, intimidation, voter fraud, and violence. Instead, his greatest concern was that he would lose his job when Baghdad replaces the IECI technocrats with political appointees. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)3. (C) In a March 26 meeting with Najaf PRT IPAOs, the Najaf head of the IECI, Mr. Hamza Kadum, who had transferred to Najaf from Kut in June 2006, readily conceded that there had been problems with the January 2005 Najaf provincial elections. Local police, he said, were biased in favor of Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI), and intimidated and harassed voters. IECI staff members, he claimed, tried to intervene but were arrested by police. More damaging, Kadum explained, was the system of closed lists, which prevented voters from knowing for whom they were voting, save the top leadership of each party.

[1](#)4. (C) The Najaf IECI has addressed the issue of polling irregularities, Kadum said. IECI staff members have met individually with all the political parties, and religious and civic leaders. They have increased awareness of the rules and procedures governing elections, and have threatened to close any polling station that does not strictly adhere to the guidelines. The IECI has received assurances from all of the political parties that they will cooperate fully and support activities of the Commission.

[1](#)5. (C) SCIRI President Abdul Aziz al-Hakim has personally assured Kadum that SCIRI and its associates will in no way intimidate, harass or pressure voters. Sporadic violence during the campaign between Badr Corps and Jaish al-Mahdi (JAM) is "expected," said Kadum. SCIRI and Badr Corps, however, are much more organized and experienced in Najaf, Kadum said, and these groups will overwhelm JAM and the Sadrists. In addition, the police and the IECI stand ready to intervene to contain any violence.

[1](#)6. (C) Kadum expressed his desire that the electoral code be changed to allow for open lists. He also advocated severe punishment for anyone found guilty of voter fraud. Once these changes are enacted, he insisted, Najaf could hold free and fair elections, in keeping with controlling legislation.

[1](#)7. (C) Kadum dismissed logistical electoral concerns. The voter lists, he explained, are simply derived from the

ration card lists and are thus ready to be published. Kadum said that the official number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the province was only 7,500 (Note: Most estimates put the number of IDPs in Najaf Province at far higher). According to the proposed methodology, these IDPs would have dedicated polling stations where they would vote for the lists and candidates in their province of origin.

¶8. (C) Kadum further stated that he had met personally with Ayatollah al-Sistani, and he was confident that the Hawza in the next election cycle would refrain from endorsing any list or individual candidate. Kadum said it was his understanding that the Hawza will not offer any electoral opinion, so as to not bias the election outcome.

¶9. (C) Kadum repeatedly described himself as a liberal with no political allegiance. He insisted that his political independence has allowed him justly to execute his responsibilities and to serve as an unbiased arbiter. He thus expressed his deep anxiety over the changes to the IECI currently being finalized in Baghdad that would replace the IECI technocrats such as Kadum with political party allies. Kadum pleaded for the U.S. government to intervene and push for placing the IECI under United Nations control. Kadum also implied that if it meant keeping his job, would likely throw his allegiance to SCIRI.

¶10. (C) Comment: Kadum's perspective on a favorable technical environment for provincial elections in 2007 is in stark contrast to most other IECI heads in south central Iraq (reftel), who fear a lack of technical preparation and

BAGHDAD 00001176 002 OF 002

potential electoral violence. While Kadum is quick to dismiss the technical and logistic challenges of conducting a free and fair election, his attitude could be a reflection of SCIRI's confidence in its position of power and of the inter-Shi'a calm that dominates the province. End Comment.  
CROCKER